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ABSTRACT

The relationships among the three dominant means of education in American society and the development of utopian thought are examined. The author defines the three forms of education as the scientific, the entropic, and the metaphysical. The scientific form pursues knowledge through rigorous empirical verification, while the metaphysical form pursues increased awareness of self-other-universe relationships by rationality that is modified by intuition or faith. In the entropic form, the most common in American mass education, knowledge is acquired through passive acceptance. Of the three paths toward greater knowledge, only the scientific and metaphysical have an integrative vision of knowledge that is capable of utopian thought. In an age of global crisis, the solving of worldwide problems requires a more integrated knowledge in which utopian thought provides a valuable moral perspective. A model is included which shows the relationships among the three forms of education and the use of current knowledge, development of new knowledge, and goal orientations toward or away from utopian thought. (Author/DE)

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THE ROAD TO UTOPIA: EDUCATIONAL PATHS

by

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ABSTRACT

A model is constructed and discussed concerning the three dominant means of education in American society: Scientific, Entropic, and Metaphysical. The relationships among the three to use of current knowledge, development of new knowledge, and goal orientations toward or away from utopian thought are shown. Science and Metaphysics are seen as having greater capacity for the integrative vision of utopian thought than is the common means of mass education--Entropic knowledge. Merit of utopian thought within scientific humanism is discussed.

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Recently I had occasion to view an episode of the popular public television series, *The Ascent of Man.*[1] Dr. Jacob Bronowski stated his view that we are not benefitted by preoccupations with seeking utopias nor by the practice of Zen. At first I accepted these "retreats" from practicality in a period of global turmoil as detriments. Further reflection, however, has caused a revision of thought.

As I attempted to place Zen and utopianism in a conceptual framework, they appeared to be opposites on a continuum of social involvement: Zen seemingly encourages individual awareness through truth-seeking while utopianism implies a "best way" for organizing society can be developed for the collectivity.

Looked at another way, however, an alternative interpretation presents itself which suggests common goals through alternative means, based in approaches to learning which are known, if not practiced in like measure, in all societies.

The purpose here is to address these goals, the means toward their attainment, and their desirability in the context of scientific humanism as advocated by Bronowski and others.

Utopian thought, named for the famous work by Sir Thomas More, connotes impracticality, a quest for an ideal, imaginary society in which social ills are remedied and harmony prevails. By its nature it is removed from the present and presently possible. Representing a remarkable improvement over society today, it might be called "Transcendent Society."

There have been utopias constructed from theological-moral bases such as More's *Utopia* and from a scientific-moral base, e.g. B.F. Skinner's *Walden Two*. Through proper social engineering, based on "right principles,"

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[1] "The Long Childhood," summary episode.

one can be brought to enlightened social conduct, maximizing individual benefits as well.

Unlike Bronowski, who laments such mental labors, I would like to suggest that the presence of utopian thought in our society is an indicator of an aspect of culture developed in spite of concentrated efforts of our mass education programs to eradicate the potential for it.

Many lines of inquiry occur before a utopia is constructed. Figure 1 suggests the possible routes such inquiries may take on the road to utopia. Three basic paths to utopian thought are charted.

(Figure 1 about here)

Beginning with inquiry, or the seeking of information from sources beyond oneself, our societal alternatives in pursuing inquiry present themselves in three basic forms:

Scientific, a foundation of current information and method in a context of stimulation to pursue through rigorous empirical verification the development of fact;

Entropic, current knowledge made available to the neophyte learner by the educator impowered to do so in a pattern of expert imposition, neophyte acceptance. This is the general mass education format of our society;

Metaphysical, current knowledge used by the learner as a stimulus to pursue increased awareness of self-other-universe relationships, as rationality is modified by intuition or faith.

Inquiry thus is modified not only by current knowledge but also by the educational model(s) available to the inquirer for continued knowledge-seeking.

In contrast with verifiable knowledge, and yet to many a viable alternative to it, is knowledge through awareness. The inquirer may seek knowledge through either or both means, but Figure 1 is set up in pure types for simplicity to show the consequences of an emphasis on one or the other means. Knowledge through awareness does not require verification. Through faith or intuition, the inquirer becomes secure regarding the correctness of the information gained.

As the model indicates, three paths may be taken. Should the inquirer select the path toward verification of knowledge through empiricism, the support of organized scholars of science will assist him or her. Should the inquirer seek "truth" through awareness, the support of organized scholars of theology and metaphysics will be forthcoming. As Bronowski himself notes:

> *There have always been two ways of looking for truth. One is to find concepts which are beyond challenge because they are held by faith or by authority or the conviction that they are self-evident. This is the mystic submission to truth which the East has chosen, and which dominated the axiomatic thought of the scholars of the Middle Ages. So St. Thomas Aquinas holds that faith is a higher guide to truth than knowledge is: the master of medieval science puts science firmly into second place.*
>
> *But long before Aquinas wrote, Peter Abelard had already challenged the whole notion that there are concepts which can only be felt by faith or authority. All truth, even the highest is accessible*

to test, said Abelard: "By doubting we are led to inquire and by inquiry we perceive the truth." These words might have been written five hundred years later by Descartes and could have been a recipe for the Scientific Revolution. (Bronowski: 1965, 45).

The middle path of Figure 1 is that which I have labeled Entropic Knowledge, for, lacking an energizing or stimulating source, it follows the pattern of closed systems and deteriorates to its most probable state, disorder. The accepting inquirer makes no effort to develop insight or expertise through further knowledge-seeking, is unlikely to utilize existing knowledge in any transcendent sense, or to reject imperfect elements of current "knowledge."

Charles E. Silberman in his widely-discussed book, *Crisis In the Classroom*, observes that the teacher decides who speaks and in what order, as well as who has access to the materials of learning. "The result is to destroy students' curiosity along with their ability--more serious, their desire--to think or act for themselves." (Silberman: 1970, 136).

Jules Henry has remarked on the docility of the American classroom in several publications. In *Culture Against Man* he demonstrates the consequences of docility in accepting imperfect current knowledge, through what he calls the process of "learning to be absurd." (Henry: 1963, 287-288).

Henry saw education as reflective of culture rather than innovative, and noted: "As a device for teaching what was necessary and preventing deviation, education became an instrument for narrowing the perceptual sphere, thus defining the human condition of being absurd, of learning to be stupid, of learning to alienate one's Self from inner promptings.... schools deal with masses of children and can manage therefore only by

reducing them all to a common definition." (Henry: 1963, 320-321).

The Entropic path is supported by an organized body of educators (not all scholars), those denizens of the mass public school.

Problems of inquiry may be viewed through the typical Western world framework of the means-end schema. As Figure 1 shows, the Scientific path and the Metaphysical path are goal-directed toward transcendent societal objectives. The Entropic path takes a form akin to the ritualism of the Mertonian model, in that means are accepted without ends. (Merton: 1957, 140).

Let us turn now to the objectives of science and metaphysics. In doing so, let us not lose sight of the possibility of imposition of knowledge by authority within both realms. Here the emphasis is upon free inquiry, supported rather than constrained by others.

Metaphysics includes the study of ontology and cosmology, differing from theology in that the latter incorporates rational interpretation of materials basically superempirical in nature. Henceforth the more general term metaphysics will be used to include theology.

Utopia for the metaphysicians takes two directions: the ideal of circumstances beyond life and the betterment of life on earth, within one's society, and within one's self.

The analogy of a "new heaven on earth" among Christians, externalization of thought to bring rewards to the individual so long as dharma is not violated (yoga) and the relief of human suffering by transcendence of self interest (Buddhism) are indicators of a basic conceptualization among metaphysicians of a relationship between good order beyond life and good order within life. While ultimate states of good order (utopia) are sought, right living is necessary within life. Thus metaphysical

education involves both the seeking of knowledge, primarily through the methods of faith or intuition, and its human application as a corollary of attainment of ultimate utopia.

In Buddhism, illumination occurs by going beyond reason. "An arouser of faith appears in the world. One associates himself with him." (Smith: 1958, 113). Such arousers typically provide a basis for education not only through codes for right living, but also by the ability to stimulate questions. Socratic techniques are often used.

The type of Buddhism singled out by Bronowski is characterized otherwise by Huston Smith:

> *The genius of Zen lies in the fact that it neither leaves the world in the less-than-ideal state in which the unregenerated awareness encounters it nor withdraws from the world in increasing aloofness, indifference and lack of differentiation...Zen does not draw the individual away from the world but returns him to it with things in a new perspective. (Smith: 1958, 143).*

Although Zen does not reject rationality and empiricism, they are but a starting point. Science, though outwardly rejecting of metaphysics finds itself bound into networks of human values in part metaphysically derived. Bronowski is aware of these in observing that every scientific description involves a judgment of what is relevant and what is not; that science is an integrated <u>vision</u> based on judgments of parts that form a unity. Science occurs through the involvement of men. [emphasis added.] (Bronowski: 1965, 90-91).

Scientific education combines free inquiry and empiricism with existing conceptualizations of order. Like the metaphysician, the scien-

tist inquirer may use his vision as a path toward utopian construction, as in the case of *Walden Two*, or toward the development of greater specialization and refinement in research, which is labeled in Figure 1 as Selective Inquiry. It is suggested here that a reason for the failure to produce more scientific utopias is the fundamental embarrassment inherent in scientific advocacy of reforms derived from what must ultimately be construed as moral judgments. This embarrassment operates in a culture dominated by Entropic knowledge which by its nature discourages reformist zeal.

The scientific community of scholars and those engaged in organized metaphysical groups both produce few written utopias concerning human societies for still another reason. Utopia suggests dramatic alterations of existing structure. Major support in the form of financial assistance and prestige as well as legal prescription or proscription may alter the capacity of both science and metaphysics for fully free inquiry. Activities are endorsed which may, as esoteric specializations, provide some small social benefit, but without the threat of radical alteration of existing social forms.

The school reflects this aversion to threat. Elementary and secondary school science programs do not stress any integrative vision; religion and metaphysics are officially banned altogether. So encouragement of utopian thought in the inquirer encounters first the stultifying environment of mass public schooling, then the developed norms of the empiricists and guardians of faith toward the selection of limited goals.

It is for this reason that, unlike Bronowski, I delight in the presence in our culture of the Zennist and the utopian scientist, however much I might cringe at *Walden Two*. Both have escaped Entropic knowledge and normative limitation.

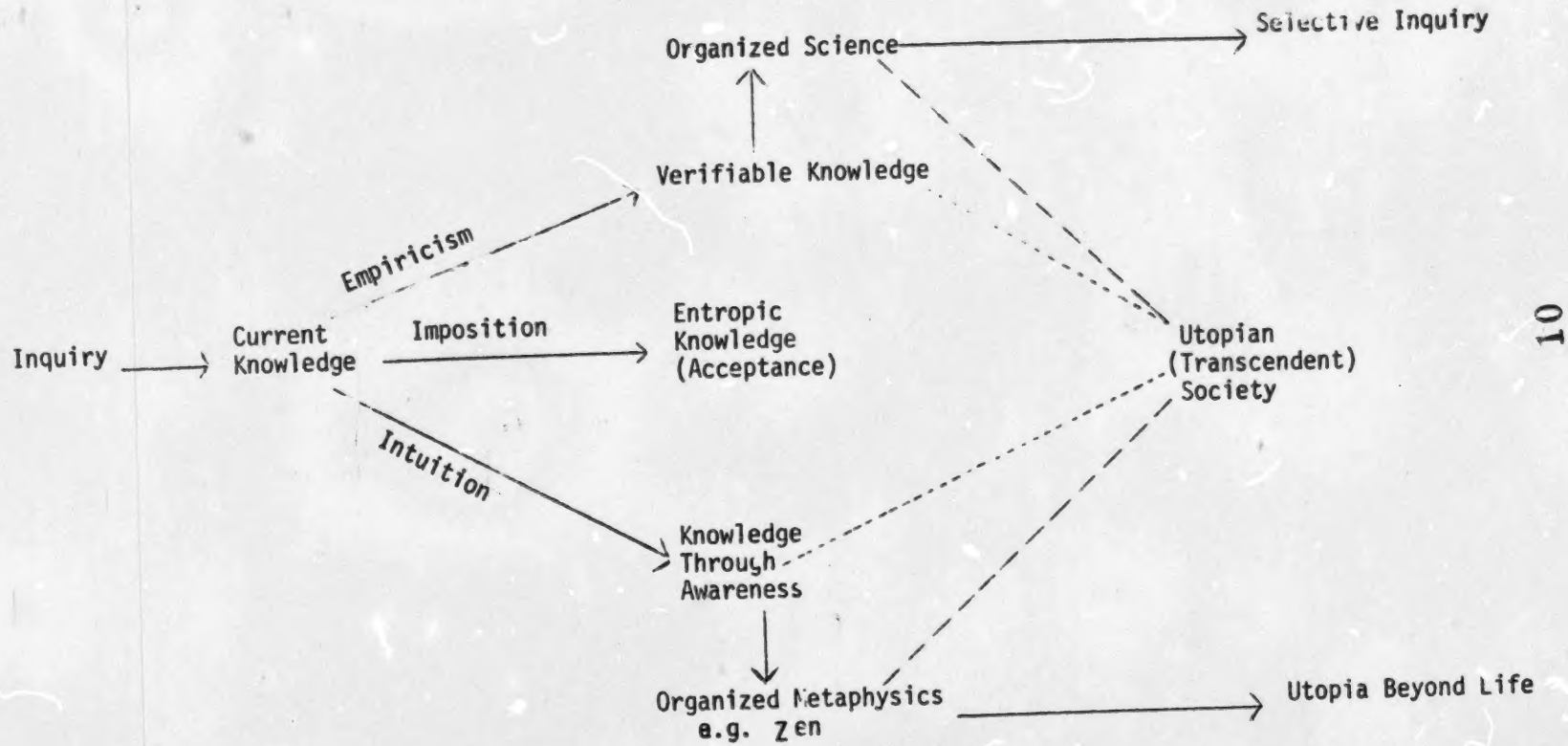

Figure 1.

A Model of Major Educational Means to Ends of Knowledge

At this point, further explanation of that part of Figure 1 which does not lead to organized science or metaphysics, but does lead to utopia is required. With this relationship the model accommodates the truly creative individual inquirer who is capable of determining both present order and good order among relationships without support or limitations of organized scholarly groups.

It is noted that this is a weak relationship, for few such individuals are produced within the pressures for docility, conformity, and affiliation of our society. Such persons use current knowledge without allowing it to be imposed for their uncritical acceptance. They may through empiricism and/or intuition develop new states of knowledge leading to their own integrative visions for transcendent society.

As numerous authors have observed, too many innovators would be disruptive to society. The history of utopian thought has been generally that of simply placing ideas for public scrutiny and acceptance or rejection. As global population increases, as resources diminish, and as hostilities increase, an occasional author remarks once more that "no man is an island." The viability of the "brotherhood" concept at the Woodstock event took people by surprise. Survival of communes advocating alternative life styles amazes. And yet the solving of our social problems becomes more and more clearly a matter of integrative vision. Scientific humanism supports more by lip service than by practice the integration of knowledge. This must be changed.

We can no longer school our young for a competitive ethic of looking out for number one, simultaneous with uncritical acceptance of what is. It is now time to minimize Entropic knowledge and to generate scholarship which not only can produce but can critically evaluate and implement ideas

developed through the integrative vision of utopian thought. It is unlikely that we will thus develop a full conversion of the, by definition impractical, utopia into a practical social order. But chiding the attempt risks loss of the capacity to attempt.

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